



## *Iowa Outdoors*

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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**Dec. 5, 2006**

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### **HARVEST REPORTING SYSTEM WORKING THROUGH FEW GROWING PAINS**

BOONE – Preliminary reports indicate that nearly 50,000 deer have been reported during Iowa's first shotgun deer season, and for most hunters the new harvest reporting system has been workable.

“We are working with the few hunters who are either having problems or have the system malfunction on them while they are reporting, but the majority are going through,” said Steve Roberts, with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) who is collecting the data.

Hunters are encouraged to write down their harvest registration number in case they have a problem receiving their confirmation number. The harvest registration number can be entered online even after the number has been reported, to check on a confirmation number. Go to [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com) then click on the harvest registration number on the right side of the page, or by going directly to [www.wildlifeiowa.com](http://www.wildlifeiowa.com) to report the harvest or to check the confirmation number.

Hunters may also call the phone system at 1-800-771-4692, which is printed on the tag, to report their harvest. The phone system allows hunter to report immediately when they tag the deer, which has certain benefits.

Steve Dermand, with the Iowa DNR law enforcement bureau was working the Turn-In-Poachers hotline during the first shotgun season weekend, when an officer called looking to confirm a story. He had stopped a pickup with an untagged deer in the back. A father and son said their tag blew off, but they reported their harvest through the phone system while in the field. Dermand checked the system and they had called in the deer an hour earlier. It was the son's first deer. The officer then provided documentation to the hunters so they could take it to a locker to be processed.

One problem with working through the new reporting requirements is that hunters are tagging the deer correctly, but are reporting the harvest registration number from another tag. Each tag has its own, unique number and the tag on the deer is the number that must be reported.

The harvest information collected in 2006-07 should provide the DNR with much better data than the postcard survey from years past. Now, deer harvest information will be available immediately by season, license type and even county. But if the data is going to be credible, hunters must report their harvest.

"We are definitely not getting all the deer reported," Roberts said. "The landowner-tenant licenses are reporting at only 18 percent success, and I think that is particularly low."

The paid any deer licenses are reporting 42.7 percent success and the paid antlerless only deer licenses are reporting 49.4 percent success. Roberts expects both numbers to increase as the week progresses. Hunters have until midnight of the day following the harvest to report their success.

First shotgun deer season closes on Dec. 6. Second shotgun deer season is Dec. 9 through 17. The majority of deer harvested in Iowa occurs during the two shotgun seasons.

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## **REGAL CANVASBACK IS STILL THE UNDISPUTED KING OF DUCKS**

By Lowell Washburn  
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CLEAR LAKE---I think that I may have just shot my last duck of the season.

I say that because nighttime temps have been dropping into the single digits lately and current wind chills are in the twenty below range. Local marshes are frozen solid. When the wind stops, even the big lake will freeze shut and fall will be over.

The duck in hand is a prime drake canvasback. He was traveling alone, boring straight into the teeth of the wind, looking for company. I spotted him about the same time he spotted the decoys. In spite of the distance, the bird's large size, powerful flight, and fighter jet profile left no doubt as to species.

My rig included 15 or so canvasback decoys. Upon spotting the counterfeits, the drake executed a sharp bank and headed for the spread. The duck arrived and quickly lowered his oversized landing gear. But the bird had come in too hot for an easy touchdown. At the last minute he pulled the webs back up and decided to bleed off more speed with a second pass.

But by now the duck was in our face, and I decided to take the shot head on. As the drake folded inertia took over, bringing the bird closer yet. So close, in fact, that I had to lean to the left to avoid being hit by the falling duck. The drake ended up hitting the soft bank directly between me and Tucker, my canine companion. I'm sure we both had a look of astonishment over this unusual development. Not wanting to shirk his duty as a nonslip retriever, Tucker simply reached down, picked up the duck, and handed it to me. Neither one of us needed to move so much as an inch from our position.

FOR IOWA DUCK HUNTERS, the 2006 season has been full of surprises. In spite of abnormally dry habitat conditions across much of the state, the duck flight was much improved over recent years. Opening weekends were good to excellent, mid-season migrations showed substantial improvement over the past three seasons, and late season hunting -- particularly for mallard ducks -- was the best in several years. But for a number of Iowa waterfowlers, the most impressive aspect of this year's hunting season was the amazing migration of canvasback ducks.

By the third week of October, overall hunter success was picking up as large numbers of diving ducks including redheads, scaup, and ring-necks invaded the state. The canvasback flight arrived across northern Iowa on October 31. The ducks came in waves. As new flocks continued to descend on larger lakes and marshes, it soon became apparent that this year's migration was going to be something out of the ordinary.

Famed for its size, beauty, and unparalleled flavor, the regal canvasback has long been regarded as North America's King of Ducks. Beneath the floor of a western cave, archeologists have unearthed 2,000-year-old canvasback decoys fashioned from reeds and dried skins and used by indigenous hunters. During the market gunning era of the 1800s, prime canvasbacks easily fetched twice the price of other species when sold at local meat counters and big city restaurants.

Although canvasbacks remain highly prized, the majority of duck hunters have never bagged one. Most of the migration occurs in extreme eastern Iowa along the Mississippi River where peak numbers of 250,000 to 300,000 'cans gather late each autumn to feed on submerged beds of wild celery. On Iowa's interior waters canvasback hunting is literally a hit or miss, here today gone tomorrow, proposition.

But just because most people haven't had the opportunity to witness the high octane excitement provided by decoying flocks of canvasback ducks doesn't mean they don't want to. My nephew, Justin Washburn, is a good example.

Although a waterfowl hunter for several years now, he has seen but never bagged a canvasback. When I phoned to report the flight was in, Justin, who now lives in Carlisle, lost no time in making plans to join my brother Sterling and me for a weekend outing.

Saturday dawned clear and crisp. The wind was favorable and ducks were flying in all directions. The first flock of cans arrived precisely at sunrise. Stunning in the early morning light, there were seven of them. A tight squadron of fighters -- all drakes -- with canvas white backs, bull necks, and sculpted chestnut heads. The birds lost no time in coming to the decoys.

"Get ready," I whispered. "Remember, you can only shoot one." [Although the daily bag limit on ducks is six, federal law dictates only one may be a canvasback.]

As the ducks arrived, we shouldered the guns and fired. Three magnificent, bull canvasbacks simultaneously fell from the flock.

The birds were perfect. My brother and I were pleased. Justin was downright elated. While Sterling and I mused over the prospects of roast canvasback, orange sauce, and wild rice, he was planning a trip to the taxidermist.

The flight continued. Although Justin killed a mallard and then a bluebill, his eyes rarely strayed from the slain drake canvasback.

The 'cans kept coming. Some simply strafed the decoys while others piled in. One flock of 10 nearly took Justin's cap off as they passed less than six feet above the cattails.

"This is just unbelievable," he said. "All my life I've wanted to get a canvasback and today they're everywhere. I could have shot at least ten by now."

The flight continued for several more days and then began to taper off into some more normal.

November has passed. The migration is over and another duck season is drawing to a close. Only stragglers, including the odd canvasback, are still arriving from the north. Although this year's flight is gone, it is certainly not forgotten. For hunters who braved the November winds, 2006 will be remembered as the Year of the Canvasback.

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## **RACCOON RIVER SAVANNA BIRD CONSERVATION AREA TO BE DEDICATED**

A ceremony to officially dedicate lands along the Middle Raccoon River as Iowa's newest Bird Conservation Area (BCA) will be held at 1:30 p.m. on Dec. 13. The event will take place at the Coon Rapids Municipal Building, 123 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave., in Coon Rapids. Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting the event. The ceremony will include brief presentations and unveiling of a special Bird Conservation Area sign, followed by a short driving tour of the savanna habitats that make this an attractive landscape for many varieties of birds.

"Designating the Raccoon River Bird Conservation Area will provide important recognition of the value of this area to a host of resident and migratory bird species," says Bruce Ehresman, DNR wildlife diversity program biologist. "Savanna--basically a mixture of grasslands with scattered trees and small woodlands--provides essential food and shelter for declining species such as barn owls, red-headed woodpeckers, orchard orioles and yellow-billed cuckoos."

"The creation of Bird Conservation Areas in Iowa is a priority for DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program and is part of a larger international effort promoting assistance for birds with the greatest conservation need," said Doug Harr, coordinator for the Iowa DNR's wildlife diversity program. Harr said the emphasis of the BCA program encourages habitat conservation at a large landscape level, to establish stable or growing bird populations. Each BCA must include a combination of well-managed public and private lands. This particular project is quite unique in that the largest habitat block is several thousand private acres protected under the recently established Whiterock Conservancy. In another portion of the BCA lies DNR's Springbrook State Park. Together, these two large protected areas, plus smaller parcels of DNR and county conservation board lands, comprise the required core habitats necessary for a landscape to be designated as a BCA.

Raccoon River Savanna BCA is the result of government agencies cooperating with private landowners, organizations and citizens, to emphasize the importance of bird habitat. "Such cooperation serves as an excellent example of ways to better conserve all natural resources in this unique landscape," says biologist Bruce Ehresman. With bird watching among the nation's fastest-growing outdoor activities, this new BCA might expect to attract bird enthusiasts from throughout the region. Any resulting growth in the local tourism also will help meet goals for the Coon Rapids area, recently named one of Iowa's pilot "Great Places." This program intends to help make some of Iowa's "good" places "great," through partnerships, cultural diversity, improved environment, engaging experiences and a vibrant economy. The new BCA should help further these values while also providing sustainable local bird populations.

The public is welcome to attend this event and help celebrate the designation of this important Bird Conservation Area.

**For more information, contact Ehresman at (515) 432-2823, or Harr at (515) 281-4815.**

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## **VOLUNTEERS PROVIDED MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE**

DES MOINES — There's no doubt in most peoples' minds that it is always better to give than to receive. Thanks to new opportunities from Keepers of the Land, the volunteer program with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), anyone can show some holiday cheer and give back to Iowa's parks and natural resources.

- **Tire Pile Cleanup:** On December 9, volunteers are needed to assist in removing and recycling of 1,500 tires in northeast Des Moines. No minimum time commitment required. For more information, please contact Jeff Gerts at (515) 281-8176.
- **Wildlife Volunteer Opportunity:** Maquoketa Wildlife Unit officials need assistance from volunteers in collecting tissue samples for chronic wasting disease testing. This opportunity goes from December 2 – December 22, 2006. For more information, contact Randy Robinson at (563) 682-7392.
- **Prairie Management Opportunity:** Officials at Brushy Creek State Park are in need of volunteers to help with an array of prairie management tasks such as seed cleaning and the clearing of invasive species. This is an immediate and ongoing opportunity. For more information, contact Bill Johnson at (515) 543-8319.
- **Shooting Range Attendant Opportunity:** Officials at the Banner Shooting Range are looking for range attendant volunteers Fridays – Tuesdays starting immediately. For more information, contact Rod Slings at (515) 281-8652 or Megan Wisecup at (515) 281-7828.
- **Polk City Range Baffling Disassembly:** Volunteer assistance is needed to dismantle the Charles Butch Olofson Range in Polk City, Iowa. Four baffles need to be dismantled from each of the four shooting ranges throughout December. For more information, contact Michael Warman at (515) 238-6977.
- **Air Quality Volunteer Opportunity:** Help improve the quality of Iowa's air with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Air Quality Bureau. Activities include various project management tasks. For more information, contact Jason Marcel at (515) 281-4873.

Visit the Keepers of the Land website at [www.keepersoftheland.org](http://www.keepersoftheland.org) for information on these and more volunteer opportunities. For more information, contact Merry Rankin at (515) 281-0878 or at [Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us).

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Proceeds go to conservation...

## **NATURE PLATE MAKES GREAT HOLIDAY GIFT**

DES MOINES - Iowans who are still stumped on what to buy the person who has everything, can breathe easier. They can choose from three, beautiful, natural resource license plates for a unique gift, and support natural resources at the same time.

Choices for the plate include: a pheasant, bald eagle or goldfinch on a wild rose, and the gift receiver can make the pick. A gift certificate of \$45 for a plate can be purchased for an individual's car, truck, trailer or motorcycle, all at the county treasurer's office.

Besides being the state's most attractive plate, 100 percent of its cost goes directly into conservation programs in Iowa. The money is divided between the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) program and Wildlife Diversity. REAP distributes money to cities, counties and state efforts for parks, habitat, water quality and historic preservation. The Wildlife Diversity program supports nongame species of wildlife, such as eagles and goldfinches, and their habitats.

The gift receiver will have to follow through with the treasure's office by bringing in their old plates and registration. On the receiver's vehicle registration anniversary, an annual renewal fee of \$25 is assessed for the specialized plate. For more information about Iowa's natural resource plates and the programs they support, visit [www.iowareap.com](http://www.iowareap.com).

**For more information contact: Ross Harrison, 515.281.5973;  
ross.harrison@dnr.state.ia.us**

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## **GREAT GIFTS FROM THE IOWA NATURE STORE**

DES MOINES - Uniquely Iowa gifts for the outdoors person are just a mouse click away at the Iowa Nature Store. From t-shirts, sweatshirts and caps to books and gift certificates, the on line Nature Store guarantees delivery by Christmas if ordered by Dec. 19. All proceeds benefit state parks in Iowa.

The Nature Store has a newly designed website for easy ordering. Orders can also be placed by phone using the Nature Store gift catalog that is included in the 2007 Iowa Conservationist calendar. The \$3 calendar can be ordered, toll free at 866-410-0230.

Nature Store purchases can be shipped by the US Postal Service for the most competitive prices on line.

To order apparel and educational materials, visit [www.iowanaturestore.com](http://www.iowanaturestore.com). You can also choose to pick up your order at the store in Des Moines to avoid shipping fees, at Broken Arrow, 4133 Merle Hay Road.

**For more information contact: Ross Harrison, 515.281.5973;  
ross.harrison@dnr.state.ia.us**

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## **NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION TO MEET DEC. 14 IN DES MOINES**

DES MOINES - The Natural Resource Commission of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will meet at 8:30 a.m., Dec. 14, in the fourth floor conference room, Wallace State Office Bldg., in Des Moines. The meeting is open to the public.

Members of the NRC are Joan Schneider, Randy Duncan, Carol Kramer, Richard Francisco, Janice Marcantonio, Lennis Moore and Elizabeth Garst. The DNR Director is Jeffrey Vonk.

The following is the agenda for the December meeting.

- Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes of Nov. 9 Meeting
- Director's Remarks
- Construction Projects
- Manchester Law Enforcement, Delaware County – Boat Storage Building
- Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area, Johnson County – Subimpoundment Construction
- Viking Lake, Montgomery County – Shoreline Stabilization
- Red Rock Wildlife Management Area, Polk County – Subimpoundment Construction
- Lake Manawa State Park, Pottawattamie County – Re-roof Five Shelters
- Wilson Island Recreation Area, Pottawattamie County – Water System Improvements
- Honey Creek Resort, Appanoose County – Grading and Wastewater System Construction
- Lake Darling, Washington County – Consultant Selection
  - Land Acquisition
- Loess Hills State Forest, Harrison County – Randolph
- Loess Hills State Forest, Harrison County – Little Sioux
- Boone Forks Wildlife Management Area, Webster County – Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF)



- Pool Slough Wildlife Management Area, Allamakee County – INHF
- Algific Talus Slope Area, Clayton County – Klauer
- Otter Creek, Fayette County – Van Sickle
- Easement – Council Bend, Pottawattamie County
- Easement – Shimek State Forest, Lee County
- Conservation and Recreation Donations
- Contested Case – Appeal of Proposed Decision – William J. Hubbard, Jr.
- Concession Contract – Backbone State Park
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 33, REAP
- REAP Conservation Education Program Grants
- Iowa State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)
- Agreement with South Dakota, Nebraska and Izaak Walton League
- Timber Sales
  - Yellow River State Forest, Paint Rock Unit
  - Loess Hills State Forest, Pisgah Unit
  - Holst Hills State Forest,
- Wildlife Depredation Program
- Summerset State Park/Central Iowa Trails Association 28E Agreement
- General Discussion
- Items for Next Meeting, Jan. 17, in Des Moines

**For more information, contact Karyn Stone at 515-281-8650.**

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